



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



JACK GILL RECEIVES FORD TRUCK ON VETERANS DAY

Purple Heart recipient and Vietnam Veteran Jack Gill was officially presented with his new wheels on Veterans Day in New York. The new vehicle is a special mobility– equipped Ford F-150 Raptor. The vehicle was gifted by the Wounded Warriors Family Support and Ford.

The mission of Wounded Warrior Family Support is to provide support to the families of those who have been wounded, injured or killed during combat operations.

They have provided more than 100 vehicles to wounded soldiers to improve their ability to get around.

Traveling with Jack to New York for



the presentation was Ken Teunissen, state commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter.

If you missed the presentation you can watch it here at this link to “Fox and Friends.”

https://video.foxnews.com/v/6102306598001/?fbclid=IwAR0OYZPIUdHsZIGBwD2kwSpfpPfjzRN4Gt89GQHCKT_G18s2ZX7tLfB8Zo0#sp=show-clips

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VA AND U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION LAUNCH EFFORT TO PRIORITIZE MENTAL HEALTH

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) [Secretary's Center for Strategic Partnerships](#) and the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation](#) today, pledged to support the mental health and welfare of the country's workforce.

Included in this collaboration is the [President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End the National Tragedy of Suicide or PREVENTS](#) and more than two dozen leading partners representing more than six million workers nationwide.

"We're grateful for the opportunity to work with public and private partners to make mental health a priority," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We're working with a coalition of companies and organizations to develop a best-practices guide on mental health in the workplace."

The guide will help empower employers of all sizes as they work to prioritize employee welfare and address this critical issue.

"Mental health and well-being are top strategic imperatives for American business, as represented by the broad coalition of companies and organizations who are working with the Chamber Foundation and the Department of Veterans Affairs to prioritize mental health in the workplace," said U.S. Chamber of Commerce vice president and [Hiring Our Heroes](#) president, Eric Eversole. "Together, we can make a meaningful difference in our employees' lives and strengthen our communities."

Promoting emotional health in corporate America is a necessary step towards ending the stigma for veterans and non-veterans alike.



U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Hiring Our Heroes

Hiring Our Heroes is a nationwide initiative to help veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses find meaningful employment opportunities.

OPERATION PROTECT VETERANS

The South Dakota AARP organization celebrated Veterans Day by promoting their new national program "Operation Protect Vets." Informational events were held in Rapid City, Sioux Falls, and Aberdeen this week.

The program is designed to protect veterans from frauds and scams and provides resources that help veterans and their caregivers navigate life after service.

You can learn more about AARP's "Operation Protect Vets" at <https://states.aarp.org/south-dakota/helping-veterans-fight-back-against-fraud>.

To request a free packet, email sdaarp@aarp.org or call 866-542-8172. This information is also available at aarp.org/veterans.



SPECIAL GUESTS VISIT VETERANS AT STATE VETERANS HOME

Third, fourth, and fifth grade elementary leaders from Hot Springs visited residents at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home on Veterans Day this week.

In addition to visiting with the residents, they also delivered goody bags to them.



VETERANS DAY PROGRAMS

Special thanks to all the schools, county and tribal veterans service officers, veterans service organizations, and community leaders for the outstanding Veterans Day programs that honored our veterans and their families.

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock attended Veterans Day events in Watertown and Milbank.

SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard addressed students and parents at Sonya Sotomayor Elementary School in Sioux Falls and had the honor to recognize two WW II Veterans.

Program Manager Erin Brown made a Veterans Day presentation at Dow Rummel in Sioux Falls.



SDDVA PARTICIPATES IN USF NURSING CAREER FAIR



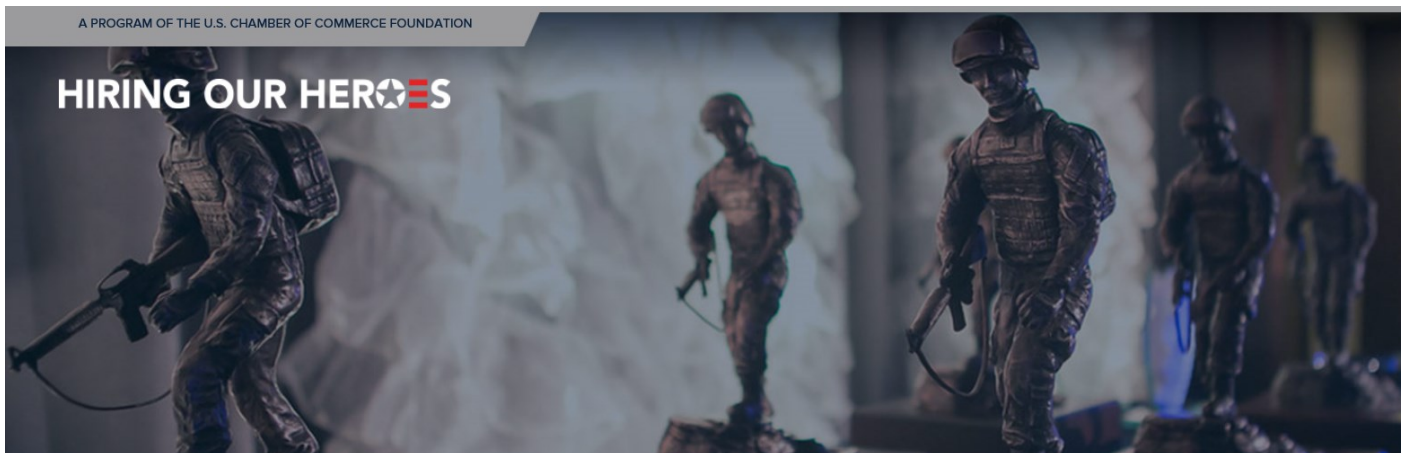
SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, Program Manager Erin Brown and Field Service Officer Brett Dickerson participated in the University of Sioux Falls Nursing Career Fair last week.

Nursing shortages are a national, state, and regional issue that impacts all healthcare providers. SDDVA has increased our outreach efforts, as well as developed scholarships and financial incentives to entice nursing students to join our team at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.



VA'S BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS NAMED FINALIST FOR MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT AWARD

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) was named a finalist Oct. 30, for the 9th Annual U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation [Hiring Our Heroes](#) awards and is a contender for the [Military Spouse Employment and Mentoring Award](#).



The Hiring Our Heroes initiative launched in March 2011 is a nationwide effort to connect veterans, transitioning service members and military spouses with meaningful employment opportunities. In July, the Board and Hiring Our Heroes partnered to promote best practices for the hiring and retaining of military spouses throughout the federal government.

"Military spouse employment in the federal government is important not just because of the unique qualities military spouses possess," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It supports the whole health of the military family."

The Board joined the [Department of Defense's Military Spouse Employment Partnership](#) in October 2018 and plans to identify additional best practices for hiring military spouses through a board military spouse working group.

The award winners will be announced Nov. 13.

USAES ASSISTANT COMMANDANT VISITS SD GUARD ENGINEERS

The assistant commandant of the U.S. Army Engineer School visited the leadership of the 153rd and 109th Engineer Battalions in Rapid City, Nov. 3, to speak about potential changes and future challenges facing the engineer community of the U.S. Army.

The 153rd and 109th invited Col. Marc Hoffmeister from the USAES in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to educate their leadership and staffs on upcoming changes that could potentially affect all future training within their units.

"I'm really honored to be here, to spend some time laying the foundation and educating your staffs on what you'll be involved with and shaping," Hoffmeister said. "The engineer formations within South Dakota have a long history of staying engaged within the (U.S. Army Engineer) Regiment and maintaining a high level of readiness."

The visit marked the first time a USAES assistant commandant has come to South Dakota and was an important effort to synchronize training and enhance the knowledge base for both battalions.

"We need to get back to grass roots combat engineering, focusing on mobility and counter-mobility to better allow us to deploy, fight and win in a multinational environment in support of national military objectives," Hoffmeister said. "As a proponent, it's important for your staffs to stay educated and to provide input to our doctrine on what works and what needs to be adjusted."

The visit was a capstone to an already important weekend for the 109th Engineer Battalion, which returned as part of the South Dakota Army National Guard force since its deactivation in 2007.

The mission of both engineer battalions is to enable, enhance and protect operational and tactical freedom of action for a supported maneuver force, such as armor, striker or infantry units. With about 160 Soldiers in each of their ranks, the battalions command and control the engineer forces necessary to conduct maneuver support focused on mobility and counter-mobility on the battlefield.

The weekend also gave the two battalions the chance to develop a working rapport, which will help increase the efficiency and effectiveness of both units in training and mission readiness.



COMMISSARY ACCESS

According to the Department of Defense, starting January 1, 2020, all service-connected veterans, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war (POW), and individuals approved and designated as the Primary Family Caregivers of eligible veterans under the Department of Veterans Affairs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) can use commissaries, exchanges, and morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) retail facilities, in-person and online.

For more information regarding these privileges and access to military installations, visit <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/expanding-access>

Who is eligible on January 1, 2020?

- Veterans
 - Purple Heart recipients
 - Former prisoners of war (POW)
 - Veterans with 0-90% service-connected disability ratings
- Caregivers
 - On January 1, individuals approved and designated as the Primary Family Caregiver of an eligible veteran under the PCAFC will be eligible for these privileges.
 - For information about primary family caregivers in the PCAFC, visit <https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>.

Note: Medal of Honor recipients and veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings are already eligible under existing DOD policy.

Required credentials.

- Veterans
 - On January 1, veterans eligible solely under this act who are eligible to obtain a Veteran Health Identification Card must use this credential for in-person installation and privilege access. The VHIC must display the veteran's eligibility status (i.e., PURPLE HEART, FORMER POW or SERVICE CONNECTED). Veterans can apply here: <https://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vhic/index.asp>.
 - Veterans eligible solely under this act who are not enrolled in or are not eligible to enroll in VA health care, or who are enrolled in VA health care, but do not possess a VHIC will not have access to DoD and Coast Guard installations for in-person commissary, exchange, and MWR retail privileges, but will have full access to online exchanges and American Forces Travel.

Medal of Honor recipients and veterans with 100% service-connected disability ratings are eligible for DoD credentials under DoD policy.

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COMMISSARY ACCESS (CONTINUED)

- Caregivers

Eligible caregivers will receive an eligibility letter from the Office of Community Care.

If you are a Primary Family Caregiver under the PCAFC and lose your eligibility letter, please call 1-877-733-7927 to request a replacement. Please allow two weeks for processing.

Find out more about military resale privileges at the following links:

Army and Air Force Exchange Service (<https://www.shopmyexchange.com/vets>)

Coast Guard Exchange (<https://shopCGX.com>)

Defense Commissary Agency (<https://www.commissaries.com/>)

Navy Exchange (<https://www.mynavyexchange.com/>)

Marine Corps Exchange (<http://www.mymcx.com/>)

MILITARY STAR Card (<https://www.myecp.com/>)

American Forces Travel (<https://www.americanforcestravel.com>)

VA SHARK TANK AWARDS

As part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) efforts to promote grassroots innovations throughout its health care system, the agency recently crowned winners from the [Veterans Health Administration \(VHA\) Innovation Ecosystem's](#) 'Shark Tank' competition during the Oct. 23, [VHA Innovation Experience \(iEx\)](#) event.

The competition serves as a platform for employees to pitch their ideas for improving health care services for veterans. The winners' innovations will be implemented at select facilities.

"This is a huge cultural shift from the way the VA has done things in the past," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We can't solve everything from Washington. Events and competitions like VHA's 'Shark Tank' that showcase employees' innovative ideas, empowers frontline personnel to take charge to improve services in needed areas."

The 12 practices and 15 medical center director winners were chosen from a pool of more than 500 applicants. The winning practices include expanded digital health capabilities, improved access to care and suicide prevention. The partnership between the creators of the practice and selected facilities will kick off at the Diffusion of Excellence Base Camp in February 2020 at the [Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System](#).

To view the finalists' pitches from the 2019 VHA Shark Tank Competition visit the [VA YouTube page](#).



VETERANS IN AMERICA PORTRAITS

The national exhibit, “We the People: Portraits of Veterans in America,” will be on display Oct. 25—Dec. 22 at the City Gallery in Charleston, South Carolina. Their expected permanent home will be in Quantico, Virginia.

Artist Mary Whyte set out on an inspirational seven-year mission to paint 50 portraits of America’s veterans. Veterans of all ages, all walks of life, and all eras from each of the 50 states.

One of the 50 veterans featured is Kella With Horn, an Aberdeen resident and Lakota woman who served from 1986 to 1988 with the U.S. Army. She

serves on the Governors’ South Dakota Veterans Commission. In 2014 she co-founded the Lakota Women Warriors, a Native American, female color guard made of veterans and service members from all military branches.



We the People: Portraits of Veterans in America” is a multi-faceted effort with three main components: the exhibition, a newly formed nonprofit, [Patriot Art Foundation](https://www.patriotartfoundation.org/), which seeks to honor veterans, provide support as they return to civilian life and connect veterans to online art, history and healing resources. and a book, “We the People,” published by the University of South Carolina Press.

Click here to learn more about artist Mary Whyte:

<https://www.marywhyte.com/exhibition.php>. To learn more about the Patriot Art Foundation and the exhibit, click here: <https://www.patriotartfoundation.org/exhibition.php>.



VA AND PET PARTNERS COMBINE EFFORTS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) partnered with non-profit organization [Pet Partners](#) in October to help improve quality of life, social engagement and health of veterans, by increasing access to animal-assisted activities (AAA) and animal-assisted therapy (AAT) services throughout the VA health care system.

Pet Partners and the VA will train therapy animal teams, encourage VA medical facilities to establish and expand trained therapy animal visitation, and provide AAA and AAT programs to give patients connection, comfort and joy that comes from spending time with animals.

“Emerging research recognizes the positive effects interactions with animals can have on patients,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The VA’s work with Pet Partners provides unique resources to our veterans, through animal-assisted activities and therapy.”

The partnership also provides veteran communities with volunteer opportunities and helps integrate veterans and their families into Pet Partners’ activities and events.

A wide range of research and studies suggest the human-animal bond can lead to lower blood pressure, reduced risk for cardiovascular disease, lessened anxiety, pain and loneliness. Time with therapy animals not only promotes physical and mental health but also supports wellness across variables such as social interaction, rate of recovery and personal motivation.

For more information, visit [health partnerships](#).



Touching lives and
improving health
through the power of
therapy animals.



VA CENTER FOR WOMEN VETERANS CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) [Center for Women Veterans \(Center\)](#) commemorated 25 years of providing dedicated advocacy for America's women Veterans Nov. 7, at VA headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Established by Congress in November 1994, the Center monitors the VA's administration of benefits and services to women veterans to ensure they receive equal access to the VA programs.

"The Center serves an important role in how the VA addresses the evolving needs of women veterans — from identifying ways that the VA can enhance its benefits and services — to creating initiatives that demonstrate the stellar contributions of women veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The Center has also shown great commitment honoring the legacy of the women who serve."

The commemorative opening remarks came from the secretary, there was acknowledgement of the Center's accomplishments and recognition of special guests including: Retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Irene Trowell-Harris, the center's longest serving former director; Retired U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 5, Phyllis Wilson, current president of the



Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation; author and women veterans rights advocate, Erin Miller; and Elizabeth Estabrooks, Oregon women veterans coordinator and pioneer of the ["I Am Not Invisible"](#) campaign.

Center accomplishments:

- Operationalizing and managing [VA's Women Veterans Program \(WVP\)](#), comprised of representatives from the VA's administrations and staff offices, to enhance the delivery of VA benefits and services.
- Establishing public and non-profit partnerships, to improve understanding of VA's benefits, services and processes.
- Creating national initiatives to promote cultural transformation in the VA and the public, and to encourage women veterans to self-identify as veterans.
- Providing support to [VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans](#), which was created to advise the VA's secretary on the needs of women Veterans.

Visit [the Center for Women Veterans' initiatives and the Advisory Committee on Women Veterans](#) for more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 14—Veterans Day Program—Elk Mountain School—Elk Mountain—2:30 pm (MT)
Nov 15—ERLS Wills for Heroes—Sioux Falls VA Medical Center—Room D39 (2501 W. 22nd Street)—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)
Nov 26—Bridge Dedication—Hot Springs—1:30 pm (MT)
Nov 27—VA Stakeholders Meeting—Sioux Falls VAHCS—10:30 am (CT)
Nov 28-29—State Offices Closed
Dec 3—Governor Noem's Budget Address
Dec 4—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—Noon (CT)
Dec 5—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 17—Watertown—Noon (CT)
Dec 7—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—VFW—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Dec 9—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial at Capitol Lake in Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 11—Sioux Falls VA Stakeholders Conference Call
Dec 23-25—State Offices Closed

2020

Jan 1—State Offices Closed
Jan 14—State of the State Address
Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception
Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center—Oacoma
Mar 25—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown
May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings
May 30—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7
Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron
Sep 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8 (Tentative)
Oct 11—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 (Tentative)



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